

Midnight Ramblings 3

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Disclaimer: Sing it again! D.C. Comics owns these lovely boys (they really need to learn how to share). As such, I don't make any money from writing something like this. All bow down to D.C.

This would be a continuation of the previous two Midnight Ramblings (whoah! Holy unique concept Batman!). This won't be the last one either. I didn't end up where I wanted to, but it seemed too natural to stop here rather than ruin the story by pushing onward. So what do you think? Can I officially nickname this the story that wouldn't die yet? Anyway, on with the show. I present to you "Midnight Ramblings 3" for your daily dose of batty fun.

"Midnight Ramblings"

"Hey Bruce, we need to talk."

The dark haired man looked up from his mahogany desk. Not quite smiling, Bruce glanced over Dick. "This sounds familiar. Should I be worried?"

Dick smiled back hesitantly. "No, it's nothing like that. I just needed to ask your opinion on something."

Bruce's smile widened in relief and he stood up. Coming around the desk, he laid a hand on Dick's shoulder. "Ask away."

Dick sighed heavily and shoved his hands deep into his jeans' pockets as he studied his feet. "Are we still friends? I know a lot was said and I thought we had gotten out all the issues, but I want to be sure," Dick said in a rush. He looked up hopefully.

Bruce reached up with his free hand so that he was gripping Dick by the shoulders. "Of course we are Dick. Who else would help me gang up on Alfred?"

Dick grinned widely. "Good. That's great."

"Well I'm glad too." Bruce dropped his hands and walked back around the desk. "Listen, why don't you sit and tell me what you've been up to since I saw you last."

Together they sat, and talked into the night.

Bruce smiled to himself. He had gone to get something to drink from the kitchen. When he had returned, he found Dick fast asleep in the high-backed leather chair that sat in front of his desk. Dick looked almost innocent in his sleep, Bruce thought. He grinned, which he certainly is not. With a martyred sigh, he bent down and picked up the younger man. He was shocked that Dick was as light as he was. "You need some more of Alfred's cooking my friend."

Gently he tucked Dick's head under his chin and hugged him closer, one hand supporting the young man's legs and the other wrapped around his shoulders. He carried Dick further into the house and into his old bedroom. Without turning the lights on, Bruce laid him on the bed, carefully lowering his head to the pillow. He sat down next to his newly returned partner and placed a hand tenderly along his face. Dick had gotten thinner, Bruce noticed again, the cheekbones more defined. His thumb traced his jawbone, stroking from the point of his chin to where the jaw met the neck. Down his hand moved, to rest his palm in the hollow of his throat. Almost with relief he stopped the downward motion of his hand over Dick's heart. Steady the heartbeat, pumping blood to the body. Bruce's eyes closed, he was home. With a heavy sigh, he turned toward the foot of the bed and slipped off Dick's shoes. He then picked up the comforter from the end of the bed and laid it carefully over the sleeping young man. Tiredly he stood and left the room.

Dick smiled in his sleep and curled up his hand to his chest, to cover his heart.

"Oww! Damnit Bruce, I'm fine would you leave me alone." Dick swatted Bruce's hands away from the bump on his head. He had been working out on some of the gymnastic equipment in the workout room and had hit his head when he slipped. "Besides according to you and Al, I landed on the hardest part of me."

Bruce caught his head in his hands again. "Dick, I need to look at it. You blacked out for a few minutes there." Pressing on a particularly swollen looking spot, Bruce asked "Does this hurt?"

Dick winced and glowered at him, not deigning to give him an answer. It didn't take long for Bruce to finish the rest of his examination. Rubbing the front of his head, he tried to massage away a fierce headache. "Can I go now doc?"

Bruce frowned, ignoring his sarcasm. "I thought you hit the back of your head."

"I did. You were there remember?" Dick didn't want to tell him that he was the reason he had fallen. He had been trying to show off for the older man when he had been woefully out of practice.

Bruce sat back on his haunches and looked him over once more. "You're sure nothing else is hurt?"

Dick started to get up. "Why you going to kiss it andâ€|.whoa!" His hand flew to steady his head. "The room just did a 360."

Bruce helped Dick sit back down. "Well, I would say you had a moderate concussion." Dick groaned, he knew what that meant. "I'll go get the boardgames," Bruce told him with an evil grin. With that he stood and walked out of the room whistling what sounded suspiciously like "Oh What a Beautiful Morning".

Dick grimaced. "Dick ol' boy, as soon as your head stops spinning, I suggest you find a hiding place." With an effort, he tried to stand again, with the same amount of success. He cradled his aching head carefully in both hands. "Maybe they'll be merciful and just kill me outright."

Half way through the vigil, Dick was ready to spike his family's drinks in order to get some sleep. As it was, he had plans to burn every single Monopoly board in the house. Dick was currently trying to avoid both of his tormentors. He had heard Bruce mention something about a Scrabble tournament and he had beat a quick retreat from the living room. Dick shuddered in horror. Who knew what those sadists would come up with next. All he wanted to do at this point was down some aspirin, find a flat space, and pass out. But every time he came close to shutting his eyes, one of them would show up and drag him around the house in search of something to do (standing up, of course). Speaking of which, here came one of them now. Dick looked frantically for a door to escape through or a large piece of furniture to hide behind. Alfred peered down the darkened hallway and smiled at Dick's attempts to avoid them.

"There you are, Master Dick." Dick sighed in resignation and let himself be led back to the living room.

It was several more hours later before Dick was able to escape again. He then made his way to his bedroom and more importantly his bed. With a sigh, he climbed onto it, shoes and all and promptly fell asleep. Bruce didn't find him for another half-hour. By that time, Dick was far-gone in dreamland.

Bruce smiled in indulgence at the young man sprawled across the huge four poster bed. How he managed to take up so much space was beyond him. He sank into a chair next to the bed and decided Dick could be allowed to sleep for a few more minutes. He was content to watch over the sleeping boy.

Dick didn't realize where he was at first. The rough circular area was too dark for him to really determine many details. The ground beneath his bare feet was packed dirt. The ceiling was tall enough he couldn't see it or feel it. He didn't see anyone near. Looking down, he noticed he was still wearing the clothes he had been wearing earlier, minus shoes and socks. Turning around slowly, he curled his toes into the dirt. He realized it had been a long time since he done that, not since he had left the circus. With a grimace, he slipped

his hands into his back pockets and suddenly remembered what this place reminded him of. Now he wanted to be home, awake, even if Alfred and Bruce still insisted on torturing him. This was way too near the threshold of uncomfortable and painful. With that revelation, the lights came up and Dick saw his old home again. Nothing had changed. He blinked back sudden tears, a few slipping down his cheeks anyway. The place seemed haunted without an audience, the rambunctious family circus setting up, or animals calling to each other. The place was haunted, Dick thought, old flashes of memory playing out over the scattered equipment. That particular happy thought sent a shiver down to his toes and back up. He decided to leave before the ghosts became more substantial than a memory.

Too late. The sound of footsteps echoed and multiplied in the huge space, muffled only by the dirt floor and scattered sawdust. Dick steeled himself, removed his hands from his pockets and self-consciously wiped away tear tracks before turning around. His mind stopped for a moment, refusing to believe. He wouldn't let himself believe. That way lies madness, Dick thought, you know they're dead. Right, he acknowledged, they're dead. They're dead; it became an inner mantra. But why were his feet moving towards them, almost running. His arms were outstretched to them. Stop that part of him screamed, they're not real. He stumbled as his head fought out the internal struggle and stopped just short of the shadowy figures. No, he thought, don't do this to me. They're gone. In the end, neither side won. Dick stood where he had stopped, frozen and trembling with the effort not to run, forward or back. The phantoms waited for him to decide. Dick couldn't breathe, he couldn't move. He was safe if he didn't move, didn't test their reality. He blinked slowly, straightening. He was going to turn around and leave, he decided. He spun and started to walk, only to run straight into them. They were solid, real, he could feel them. Dick started to shake. NOOO! Something inside him wailed, not again. Too late, the caution returned. He was already holding them both tightly and the warning was drowned in the relief he felt. Everything was all right. He was being held and loved. They were back he thought and relaxed into the grip.

His mother was the first to move. She lifted her son's chin so that she was looking him straight in the eyes. Gazing carefully into his eyes, she seemed to be telling him goodbye. Dick tightened his hold on them. He remembered how this dream ended. His parents seemed to understand. They returned the force of the hug, almost cracking Dick's ribs. Then they started to fade. His mother's face seemed apologetic, his dad's upset and frustrated. As one they reached for the young man kneeling in the dirt, and missed. Dick couldn't move as he watched them disappear. Again, again, was all that ran through his mind. It was happening again. He watched until they faded into the tent wall, and then he curled around himself, resting his head on his knees. His hands beating a steady tempo into the dirt, Dick cried silently into the denim of his jeans. No, no, no he thought to the rhythm of his hands hitting the ground, not real. And then he was awake.

Dick woke quietly. No tears, no cries, he just opened his eyes. The bruised feeling that usually accompanied the dreams hit full force then. He turned his face into the pillow in an effort to stifle the screams. It hurt so much and the dreams wouldn't stop. Ever since he had left the mansion, they had been coming. Every night, every time he fell asleep. It was so bad for awhile there, that he had taken to

exercising before going to bed until he was exhausted. Then at least the dreams didn't come. When he had come back home, he thought that the dreams would have stopped. After all the reason for the dreams, another home lost, had ended. He had been right, the dreams had been blessedly absent until tonight.

Dick had been so dismal that he hadn't noticed the hand rubbing his back soothingly, at first. He tensed when he actually became aware of it. Despite that, the hand continued to rub up and down rhythmically. Dick was almost soothed until he realized that the person rubbing his back had to have noticed the nightmare, considering the fact that none of his family members were the touchy-feely type voluntarily. They wouldn't have done this normally. He knew his cheeks were practically glowing from the embarrassment of being seen this weak in front of Bruce. Because the other person had to be Bruce, his hand was too strong and assured to be Alfred.

Gulping a breath, Dick braced himself and turned over, startling the hand now hovering somewhere over his stomach. His guess had been right. Smiling brightly he decided lying out his teeth would be the best way to avoid sympathy. "Wow, that was some dream. Thanks for waking me up, Bruce."

Bruce had to decide what to do with his hand before answering. "It must have been fairly intense judging from the way you were fighting the blankets." He hesitated before continuing. "Would you like to talk about it?"

Maybe he was still dreaming. Touchy-feely Bruce was scary enough, sensitive, caring Bruce was just weird and disturbing. Dick looked Bruce over, possibly for signs of possession. He sighed. Nope, not dreaming. He had never been able to capture the intensity of those eyes in any of his dreams. The fantasies would always fell flat when he imagined looking in Bruce's brooding brown eyes. In real life, staring in them was enough to give him the shivers. Dick roped in his hormones, survival first. Widening his eyes in a look that had never fooled his mother, he replied innocently enough, "What's there to talk about?"

"Whatever you dreamed about that had you screaming into your pillow, after the dream was over."

Damn the man, he hadn't been fooled for a second. Dick scrambled for something easy that didn't involve masochistic parental visits. "I don't remember much, just a vague dream." Dick risked a glance at Bruce. No, he wasn't buying that either. Okay, embellish it, something he'll believe. Shrugging reluctantly, he chanced it. "Two-face may have been there for a second."

"Oh. You know Dick, I won't think less of you over something like this." Dick was ecstatic. He bought it. He had fooled ol' Stonewall himself. Bruce looked Dick carefully in the eyes. Shiver alert! Dick stamped ruthlessly down on that instinct. "I still have dreams about the first man I killed."

Dick could have smiled. If that was what the man thought, let him run with the idea. Looking down (or he would never be able to pull this off), he took in a breath engineered to sound tortured. "I know it wasn't my fault, but I still feel guilty for wanting him dead. Why?" He shook his head, partly to keep from laughing. He should have been

in show business he crowed to himself. Now for the finishing touch. "After all, he killed myâ€¦" And suddenly it wasn't a game anymore. Dick forgot about fooling Bruce as the dream blossomed again in front of his eyes. He felt himself tense and shake as he saw his parents and brother lying motionless on the circus floor.

Bruce was confused for a moment. Dick had had his head down, so he hadn't seen his eyes glaze over. Bruce did notice when he began to tremble. Slowly so as not to startle him, Bruce gently reached out to grab Dick's shoulder. Violently Dick shrugged him off. "Don't touch me!" It took Bruce a moment to realize that Dick hadn't been talking to him. Bruce tried again, but with a softer touch, gently rubbing his hand in circles when Dick didn't object.

"Dick, it's alright," he soothed. Dick's head snapped up to look Bruce in the face. His eyes were wild and uncomprehending, but they focused in on Bruce. Slowly, he watched as reason returned to Dick, and he muttered one word, "No." Then Dick sank back into the pillows, eyes completely sightless.

Worried, Bruce hefted the boy up into his arms. Alfred would know what to do but Bruce refused to leave Dick alone to get him. That decided, he carried his young charge back downstairs to the living room and his old friend.

Dick woke to a light being shined in first one eye then the other. "I thought I was the one who was suppose to check for cracks in my eyelids. Oww! Alfred, stop, please?"

Alfred did as he was asked and stood slowly. With concern he watched his young master rub his forehead. "You still have a headache, Master Dick?"

Dick sat up and shot Al a look; he knew better than to call him that. "Only the one you just gave me. I'm fine Al. Concussion gone bye-bye!" Dick smiled his most charming smile and waved to Alfred. "Like I am going to do right now. See ya' round Al." Dick moved to stand up and leave.

Alfred, long accustomed to handling reluctant superheroes placed a restraining hand in the middle of Dick's chest. "Master Bruce wanted you to wait here for him. He will be returning shortly." Alfred watched as Dick winced and covered his eyes again, rubbing.

Dick, looking up and seeing Alfred's worried face, dropped his hand quickly. God, he felt like crap. All he wanted to do was go back to sleep. None of the other nightmares had been quite this bad afterwards. He wished Al would let him off the hook. He really did not want to see Bruce anytime soon, not after that little performance. Although how he had gotten down here he wasn't quite sure, he did remember a pair of fuzzy arms cradling him and a heartbeat. Yeah, the heartbeat had been almost deafening. Damn, he would be lucky if Bruce allowed him to go to the bathroom by himself, much less sleep in his own bed unsupervised.

"Master Bruce" Alfred welcomed. "Master Dick awoke a moment ago."

"Oh please, Master Bruce, sir" Dick imitated Al. "May your humble servant go now?"

Alfred raised an eyebrow as his only answer to Dick's parody. Bruce himself was not amused. "Dick, you were unresponsive for over an hour. We need toâ€¦"

"Run some tests." Dick finished for him. "Yeah, something new and different." Dick sighed heavily. "Can I at least get some sleep after this? Remember, a couple of maniacs have been tormenting me with Parcheesi to deprive me of my sleep."

Bruce ignored the last comment, not a good sign, and pushed forward with the questions. "How long have you been having episodes like this?"

Dick stared into Bruce's eyes hard, suddenly very pissed off with this interrogation. "What would we be talking about here? My nightmares or my imitation of a human statue?"

Bruce drew back from him in surprise at the venom in his voice. He swallowed back his usual retort to his ward's smart-ass remarks. Fighting to keep his own voice even, he clarified the question. "How long have you been having episodes where you lose consciousness and are unresponsive?"

"I haven't before today. I'm gonna guess the concussion had something to do with it." Dick hated what he was doing to Bruce, but damnit, he was tired and he felt like shit. He should be able to do what he wanted. Wasn't he an adult? Dick grinned to himself. Well you sure don't sound like one when you whine like that.

"Okay, how long have you been having the nightmares?"

Dick looked down. He really did not want to play this game anymore. "Since I left here."

Bruce laid a heavy hand on his shoulder in sympathy. He knew this was going to be hard. Neither he nor Dick enjoyed talking about their feelings. Bruce chuckled inwardly, and those were only the ones they would admit to. "May I ask what the nightmares are about?"

"Nightmare" Dick corrected softly. "It's the same dream." Bruce followed Dick's gaze to his lap where his white-knuckled hands bit into each other.

"And what happens?" Bruce knelt down so he could look up into Dick's face. "Dick, what happens?" Gently, Bruce separated his hands and held them in his own. "Dick, please."

Dick looked panicked. Who was he kidding, he was panicked. He didn't want to do this. It wasn't like talking would help. He would just have to relive everything that he really wanted to forget. Besides, Bruce didn't need to hear this; he didn't need another guilt trip. They had finally gotten their friendship back on an even keel. It wasn't fair. The world isn't fair he told himself savagely. If he wanted to keep Bruce's friendship, fine, then he needed to protect the man from the truth. He could lie again. After all, Bruce had fallen for it once.

Alfred chose that moment to interrupt. "Master Dick, forgive me if I

am mistaken, but are you not the one who is constantly suggesting that Master Bruce needs to talk about his problems? That the best thing for him is to 'get them off his chest'?"

Dick almost caved at that point. It really wasn't nice of them to gang up on him twice in one day. It was just further proof that his family was ruthless. But he was going to do this, with or without the added guilt. He looked down and busied himself with comparing his hands to Bruce's for several moments so he wouldn't have to look in either one's face.

"Dick" was the gentle reminder. Dick rubbed a hand over his eyes tiredly, keeping it there when he began talking. "It's about Two-Face, like I told you. It's about all the times I screwed up and almost got you killed." There, that was close enough to the truth.

Bruce sat back on his heels, removing his hands from Dick's, a look of disappointment on his face. "I can see your lying skills haven't improved over the time you've been away." He lifted Dick's chin. "Now, would you like to tell me the truth." He watched him expectantly.

Dick swallowed back tears. Why did he suddenly care? Where was he a couple of months ago? Why did it hurt so much that he did care? Dick couldn't help the small choked noise that escaped him. No, stop it right now Dick. What would this do to your tough guy image? You are nearly twenty years old. Superheroes do not cry. Nothing seemed to stop the tears, especially after Bruce gently pulled him down into a soothing hug. The warmth of his arms seemed to finally break down that last wall Dick had put between himself and his past. With a wild keening sound, Dick lost himself to his grief for the dead past while he was kept safe by the only family he had left.

End
file.